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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 001106

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SUBJECT: DAS PEKALA IN PRAGUE: MISSILE DEFENSE THE MAIN TOPIC

REF: PRAGUE 1074

Classified By: DCM Cameron Munter for reasons 1.4 b+d

¶1. (C/NF) Summary: Missile defense dominated discussions in Prague during DAS Mark Pekala's meetings. Pekala explained in public and private that a USG decision on MD site(s) in Central Europe should come in the fall; that the MD assets have no offensive capability; and that the USG welcomes a vigorous Czech public debate on MD. Czech officials expressed strong interest in seeing NATO MD move forward as well, in part because this will help counter some of the domestic opposition to a U.S. system. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) EUR Deputy Assistant Secretary Mark Pekala visited Prague September 6-7 to participate in the EUR Entry Level conference. He met with Deputy FM Tomas Pojar and with several members of Parliament, and gave several press interviews. By far the main topic of discussion in meetings and with the press was the potential U.S. offer to base some elements of our missile defense system in the Czech Republic. Other themes included positive assessment of Czech-U.S. relations, visas, and Czech support for democratic transformation and the war on terrorism.

¶3. (C/NF) Missile defense (MD) dominated each of Pekala's private meetings and his press interviews. In a meeting with Deputy FM Tomas Pojar (accompanied by Czech Ambassador to Washington Petr Kolar and Political Director Martin Povejsil), Pekala explained that a USG decision on an offer to the Czech Republic and/or Poland is expected in the fall and sought Pojar's views on the impact that the domestic political situation would have on MD. Pojar responded that the Topolanek government is firmly in favor of MD, but that the current government is only likely to last for around three months. Looking ahead, he expects that the next government "will be based on the current one." In terms of timing, any delay in a U.S. offer is good for the Czechs, given local and Senate elections that take place October 20-21 (with the second round of the Senate votes one week later): the opposition Social Democrats (CSSD), who compete for support with the staunchly anti-MD Communists, can not afford to be publicly supportive on MD in advance of the election (as demonstrated by former PM Paroubek's recent statements against MD, reftel).

¶4. (C/NF) Pojar and Kolar both noted that Paroubek had said, both privately (reftel) and publicly, that a radar-only facility would be different from a "missile defense base" -- which is generally interpreted to mean something that includes missile interceptors. But they added that it was important for the USG to continue to work closely with Paroubek, whose support would be important in the divided Parliament. Kolar, referring to a meeting he recently had

with the former PM, said Paroubek wants a "briefing" on MD. (Note: post will be meeting with several MD supporters in the coming days to plan next steps, including our approach to Paroubek and the CSSD.) Kolar also urged that in their public statements U.S. and Czech officials not focus on the possibility of splitting the two MD facilities between the Czech Republic and Poland -- even if it is politically expedient to focus only on the radar, Kolar sees long-term benefits to a debate on missile defense per se. Pojar agreed with the importance of the debate, but explained that he is focused on the need to expand the U.S. presence in Central Europe, which would best be achieved by having MD facilities in both the Czech Republic and Poland. This would also further another government priority, namely enhancing Czech-Polish cooperation (in this regard Pojar mentioned that energy security will be an increasingly important part of the Czech-Polish dialogue in coming months, specifically GOCR concern that nothing Poland does to improve its energy security situation have a negative impact on the Czech Republic).

¶5. (C/NF) Pojar and Kolar both focused on the importance of NATO to this debate. Pojar explained that the GOCR motivation is not/not to try to force U.S. MD plans together with NATO's. Rather, the Czechs genuinely want to see a NATO MD capability develop and advance as quickly as possible. That is why they want to work towards an MD deliverable at the NATO Riga Summit, and why they would like to see elements of the NATO MD Feasibility Study declassified in order to become part of the public debate. The Czechs readily admit they see a linkages to the current debate over the U.S. MD facility: a clearer NATO endorsement of the technology and acknowledgment that NATO and U.S. systems will be complementary will help win over Czech skeptics. Pojar also

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shared his personal belief that if there is not a U.S. MD site in Europe, the NATO system will never be built. Pekala noted the difficulty involved in moving NATO, but agreed to explore this further.

¶6. (SBU) Pekala discussed MD during meetings with three members of Parliament: newly-elected Green deputy Odrej Liska (likely future chair of the EU Affairs Committee), and Civic Democratic (ODS) deputies David Seich (likely to continue in his role as vice-chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee) and Petr Bratsky. In a thoughtful discussion, Liska never came out and expressed a firm opinion either for or against MD, but explained that the Greens are focused on making sure the debate has the right focus. This includes a debate about the effectiveness of MD technology itself. As a general principle, the Greens believe that a multilateral system (through NATO) is a better option than a bilateral arrangement with the United States. Liska wants to see the debate focus on the real questions, which he termed security and political relationships, rather than the economic benefits. On a referendum, Liska said the Greens would not oppose any referendum on MD, but nor would they push for one.

¶7. (SBU) The ODS deputies stressed that MD has the full support of their party, but that this was not sufficient since the ODS has only a minority government. The USG, together with Czech MD supporters, would need to work on public perceptions and winning support from CSSD, particularly from Paroubek himself. They thought that a NATO linkage would be important, especially since it was a CSSD-led government that brought the country into NATO. In response to a question from Pekala about how deeply and broadly entrenched public opinion is on the issue, Seich emphasized the importance of coming up with a good package that highlights the benefits to be gained.

¶8. (U) In the course of an extensive interview with the daily "Pravo" and separate interviews with several television and radio journalists, Pekala focused on MD, stressing that: -- the USG had not yet reached a decision on offering MD

facilities to Europe; both the Czech Republic and Poland remain under consideration; a precise date for a USG decision is not known but we hope it will be this fall.

-- the USG is encouraged that Czechs are debating and discussing missile defense (most reporters opened by asking if the USG was concerned by the "negative" tone of the public debate lately, a reference to the announcement by former PM Paroubek that his party is opposed to MD -- reftel)

-- the MD system has no offensive capabilities

-- the MD facility being contemplated for Central Europe poses no threat to Russia; the USG is in dialogue with the Russian government.

¶19. (SBU) Compared to MD, other topics were covered only briefly. In his press interviews and with the MPs, Pekala stressed repeatedly the strong bilateral relationship and the USG appreciation for Czech efforts in the GWOT and support for transformational diplomacy. Bratsky, who is personally heavily involved in many NGO-led democratization efforts, said he expects no change in the GOCR's previous strong engagement. Pekala praised Czech support for and cooperation on the EU China arms embargo and exports of the VERA radar; he encouraged continued cooperation to prevent military exports to Venezuela.

¶10. (SBU) Visas came up in several discussions. The MPs, while careful not to suggest that the Czech government should formally link MD and visa waiver, noted that this connection already exists in the minds of many Czech citizens. Pekala explained that the two are separate legal processes, but that the USG wants to see both proceed, with our position on visa waiver spelled out in the roadmap. He emphasized that over 90% of Czechs get visas and that we are regularly taking steps to improve our delivery of visa services. The visa issue was not raised at the MFA.

¶11. (U) DAS Pekala has cleared this cable.
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